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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINS TU

SUBJECT: RUMBLINGS IN ULTRA-NATIONALIST MHP

REF: A. ANKARA 1730

1B. 2004 ANKARA 7211

1C. ANKARA 1774

1D. ANKARA 0501

Classified By: POLCOUNS John Kunstadter; E.O. 12958, reasons

1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary. Although the current Turkish political environment should provide right-nationalist MHP with an excellent opportunity to challenge ruling AKP, MHP has failed to gain much traction. MHP leadership's failure has contributed to a growing dissident movement within the party.

The core problem, however, is that MHP's ideology is rooted in the fear of the dissolution of the Turkish state-nation and it is unable to address the challenges of globalization and economic development. End Summary.

12. (C) The failures and missteps of AKP over the past several months (REFS A and B); the widespread anxiety regarding the future of the Turkish economy; the increase in PKK-related violence; and the anti-American and anti-EU tone in the media have stimulated the latest nationalist backlash. Thus the current political environment provides an excellent opportunity for ultra-nationalist National Action Party (MHP) to mount a challenge against ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) (REF C).

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IS SUPPORT FOR MHP ON THE RISE?  
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13. (C) Many political commentators and Embassy contacts assert that support for MHP is on the rise. MHP Vice Chairman Faruk Bal asserted to POLOFF that party functions are well attended and party leaders are well received when they deliver speeches to audiences around the country. On August 7, MHP held its 16th annual campout and party rally at Erciyes Mountain in Kayseri. Turkish newspapers reported that approximately 500,000 people attended the rally.

14. (C) There is substantial evidence, however, that MHP's popularity is not on the rise. MHP deserves credit for hosting a rally with 500,000 attendees, but this is roughly the same number as have attended MHP's Erciyes Mountain rallies in previous years. ANAR pollster Ibrahim Uslu, moreover, recently told POLOFF that his polls indicate that MHP is still below the 10 percent threshold for representation in parliament. Ozgur Unluhisarcikli of the ARI movement told POLOFFs that his liberal-nonpartisan organization's recent surveys indicated that MHP is polling only around 6 percent. A recent TNS/PIAR poll published in Radikal newspaper also placed MHP's support at around 6 percent. MHP member and longtime Embassy contact Riza Muftuoglu also believes that MHP remains below the 10 percent threshold and he blames this on the failure of the current party leadership.

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POWER STRUGGLE WITHIN MHP  
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15. (C) Party members outside the central administration are frustrated with party chairman Devlet Bahceli and the leadership's inability to mount a successful challenge against AKP. There are also lingering irritations over the leadership's decision to join the DSP-led coalition government from 1999-2002. By joining that coalition government, MHP shared the blame for the 2000 and 2001 economic crises and was maneuvered into endorsing policy positions that had been anathema to MHP's grassroots, e.g. joining the EU, abolishing the death penalty, supporting a life sentence instead of execution for PKK terrorist leader Abdullah Occalan, and lifting legal restrictions on the Kurdish language. Muftuoglu told POLOFFs that MHP should never have joined the DSP-led government, but even after joining they should have left the government during the 2001 economic crisis or in the summer of 2002 before the elections.

16. (C) Party dissidents led by former minister Namik Kemal Zeybek and former party vice chairman Ramiz Ongun have accumulated at least 265 signatures calling for an extraordinary party convention, more than the 238 signatures

required. (Comment. Some party dissidents claim that they have collected over 550 signatures. End Comment.) The party administration is trying to resist the call for an early convention by claiming that some of the signers have changed their minds since signing the petition, but a low-level Turkish court ruled that MHP must hold a convention. Whether or not MHP will be forced to hold a party convention this year is still unclear.

17. (C) Bahceli has responded to these internal threats by having the party make a propaganda film entitled "Orange Revolution, Purple Violets" in which he accuses internal and external opponents of the party as being part of a global plot designed to weaken the Republic of Turkey. (Comment. Bahceli's preference for blaming outsiders is similar to the approach of CHP leader Baykal. Earlier this year, Baykal responded to internal challenges to his party leadership by accusing the USG being behind efforts to replace him (REF D). End Comment.) The film also accuses the US and EU of working together to expand their global power by fomenting recent revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and other countries.

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THE FAILURE OF NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY  
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18. (C) There is a widespread recognition in the party that nationalism has failed to adapt to globalization and Turkish economic realities, but leading MHP theorists are unable to develop a detailed explanation of how Turkish nationalism should address the problems of globalization and economic development.

19. (C) Dr. Umit Ozdag is a thuggish nationalist intellectual, foreign policy theorist, and one of the individuals trying to replace Bahceli as chairman of MHP. Ozdag recently stepped down as president of the Eurasian Strategic Research Center (ASAM) so he could devote more time to political activity: he told POLOFFS that he delivered over 100 speeches around the country in the past year. The pistol-packing Ozdag is clever, but he is not a rigorous thinker and he wraps himself in conspiracy theories. Intense and wily, he is utterly lacking in charm or charisma.

10. (C) Ozdag has written a book calling for a renewal of Turkish nationalism, but the thin 100 page opus minimus is heavy on rhetoric and light on policy specifics. He wants Turkey to be a wealthy and powerful country and he recognizes that this requires Turkey to embrace globalization, but he is unsure how to proceed. He is skilled at recognizing the problems and at making nationalistic arguments in favor of addressing the problems, but he is unable to develop detailed or rational policy proposals that would address the host of socioeconomic issues facing Turkey. (Comment. In this regard he is no different from most Turkish intellectuals on the social democratic left and the center-right. End Comment.)

11. (C) His political ideas are a logically inconsistent combination of anti-European conspiracy theories, nationalist sentiments, statist solutions, and grudging recognition of the realities of globalization and American power. Ozdag, for example, calls for an end to Turkey's EU membership bid and a termination of Turkey's Customs Union with the EU, but he also wants Turkey to sign a free trade agreement with the EU. (Comment. Unlike the Customs Union, a free trade agreement would allow Turkey and the EU to set different tariffs for non-EU countries. End Comment.) He states that Turkey should end its relationship with the IMF and that this step should be preceded by raising the domestic savings rate so that IMF loans are not needed, but he is unable to explain how the country could accomplish this goal. He argues that Turkish agriculture needs to be modernized and he recognizes that this would require the consolidation of landholdings and cause social disruptions, but he is unable to propose any policies to address these challenges, other than recommending that new apartment buildings be built in smaller towns and cities. Ozdag also calls for state-directed economic investment in "strategic sectors" and state-encouraged research into "high technology", but he is unable to elaborate on how this should be done.

12. (C) Ozdag also argues in his book -- and in conversations with POLOFFS -- that the Europeans are trying to create a "Turkish Milosevich," i.e. someone who will lead Turkey into an ethno-religious civil war that will result in the dismemberment of the country. Ozdag says that Turkey must resist this; but given the relish with which he discusses this scenario, we suspect he harbors dark fantasies of being Turkey's nationalist leader during a time of ethno-religious civil war.

13. (C) Dr. Riza Ayhan is a professor of international trade law at Gazi University in Ankara and another candidate to replace Bahceli. In manner and demeanor he is the exact opposite of Ozdag: Ayhan is very smooth and self confident with a patrician (if not imperial) style. Ayhan told POLOFF

that nationalism must adapt to the realities of globalization, but he was unable to elaborate on what he meant by this phrase. As with Ozdag, Ayhan recognizes many of the problems facing Turkey and Turkish nationalism, but he is unable to come up with more than vague policy recommendations.

¶14. (C) Ayhan initially told POLOFFS that he was not looking to replace Bahceli as leader of MHP, but later admitted --- with an air of noblesse oblige --- that other nationalists may put him in a position where he is forced to challenge the party leader. When POLOFF asked him to describe Turkish nationalism, Ayhan started by stating what it was not, e.g. not racist, not undemocratic, not anti-American, and not fascist. (Comment. This is a mantra that POLOFFS have heard repeatedly during their meetings with MHP party members. End Comment.) Ayhan was very critical of the EU, but he avoided --- at least in initial conversations with POLOFFS --- any conspiracy theories and, moreover, he expressed the hope that Turkey would join the EU in time for the 100th birthday of the Republic (i.e. 2023).

¶15. (C) Sevket Bulent Yahnici is considered by many Turkish observers to be another leading MHP intellectual. Yahnici is a former MHP MP from Ankara, but he is not a candidate to replace Bahceli. Yahnici is slovenly and disorganized. He met POLOFFS in his office/apartment which was littered with books and papers. He sat in a large chair next to a nargile (Turkish water pipe) with ashes on the floor. He started the conversation by trying clumsily to bait POLOFF with anti-Christian rhetoric. He then complained about rural migration to Ankara and lamented that he was one of the few Ankara-born MP to represent the province in the last parliament. (Note. He claimed that most of Ankara's twenty-nine MPs were born elsewhere. End Note.)

¶16. (C) This was followed by a long rant about the Iraq war in which Yahnici blamed ethnically Kurdish MPs for voting against the failed 1 March 2003 resolution authorizing the deployment of U.S. forces into Iraq via Turkey because the Kurdish MPs wanted to sabotage US-Turkish relations and provide a catalyst for the creation of an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq. He then eagerly launched into another long rant about the threats the EU reforms pose to the unity and survival of the Republic of Turkey. Yahnici was completely unable to provide POLOFF with a definition of Turkish nationalism, other than to repeat the standard MHP mantra that nationalism isn't racist, fascist, etc. Yahnici agreed with other nationalists that economic issues and globalization are serious challenges, but he was unable to explain how nationalism relates to these topics. Near the end of the conversation, Yahnici blamed the MHP leadership for failing to develop and adequately explain the nationalist ideology.

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TURKISH NATIONALISM ROOTED IN FEAR AND PARANOIA  
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¶17. (C) Ultimately, MHP's ideology is rooted in fear and paranoia. Turkish nationalists inside and outside of MHP have told POLOFFS that they believe that the Turkish nation-state formation process is incomplete and that enhanced democratic and minority rights could result in the dismemberment of the country. Many nationalists, moreover, do not trust the EU or the U.S. Some believe that the West European countries have deviously designed the EU membership reforms in a way that would weaken the Turkish state/military and result in the formation of an independent Kurdistan in southeastern Turkey. They also choose to believe --- as do many Turks --- that the USG orchestrated the rise of the AKP, supports the PKK terrorist organization, and is bent on a policy of world domination. In fact, when Turkish nationalists tell POLOFFS that Turkey and the U.S. need to form a strong alliance it is because they want Turkey to be on the side of the global hegemon, not because they share specific U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives.

¶18. (C) Comment. As Turkey moves down the EU road --- and especially once the EU requires reforms that will result in short-term economic pain --- the MHP will have many opportunities to build a powerful political movement galvanized around Turkish fear, paranoia, and opposition to the EU. MHP's leadership, however, has been unable so far to capitalize on this opportunity because it is mired in the policy mistakes of the DSP-led coalition government. If a new leadership is able to gain control of the party; overcome the mistakes of the past; reform the party's ideology so that it can address the challenges of economic modernization and globalization in a persuasive manner; attract a large number of ideologically motivated young people to the party; and build a loyal cadre of hardworking grassroots activists, then MHP will be in a position to challenge AKP. The degree to which this revitalized MHP will also contribute to anti-Americanism will be directly linked to how clearly

nationalists perceive the U.S. to be on Turkey's side in the  
fight against the PKK in northern Iraq. End Comment.  
MCEDLOWNEY